

Improving Access to Health Care

I have always believed that we should have three goals in health care – it must be affordable, accessible, and accountable. In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau reported there were approximately 43.6 million uninsured Americans. Many of those individuals who are uninsured are small-business owners, employees, or dependents of small businesses with less than 100 employees. I want to reassure Minnesotans that I am working for better access to affordable health care.

Association Health Plans

I am pleased to report that I am an original cosponsor of the Small Business Fairness Act to help reduce the number of uninsured individuals in America. This bill would allow for the creation of Association Health Plans (AHPs), which would allow small businesses to band together to purchase health insurance coverage for their employees. The measure would give small businesses the same market-based advantages and competitive leverage that large employers and unions enjoy when providing employees health insurance.

Substance Abuse Treatment Benefits

In an attempt to help those in need of alcohol and drug abuse treatment, I introduced comprehensive substance abuse parity legislation, called the Help Expand Access to Recovery and Treatment (HEART) Act. This legislation would give those suffering from alcoholism and drug addiction greater access to treatment by prohibiting health

insurers from placing restrictions on treatment that are different from other medical and surgical services.

Focusing on Medical Technology

With my colleague Senator Evan Bayh (D-IN), I founded the Senate Medical Technology Caucus to call attention to the need for patient access to new technologies. The caucus hosts educational briefings for Senate members and staff, arranges tours of medical production facilities and hospitals, and holds informal hearings on critical issues affecting medical technology and innovation. It also highlights innovations in medical technology, explores ways to better integrate technology into the health care system, and provides a forum to discuss challenges that limit patient access and future innovation.



Strengthening the Medicare Program

I supported passage of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA), which introduces changes that are designed to strengthen the Medicare program. Over the next three years, there will be major landmarks in Medicare coverage:

- In 2004, temporary Medicare-approved prescription drug discount cards are available for qualifying beneficiaries. Also, under the Transitional Assistance Program, certain low-income beneficiaries qualify for a \$600 credit to help pay for prescription drugs.
- In 2005, new preventative benefits will be covered, including a one-time Welcome-to-Medicare wellness physical exam and screening tests for the early detection of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.
- In 2006, prescription drug benefit plans will be available to all Medicare beneficiaries.

I also worked to ensure that significant rural health care improvements were included in the MMA. This bipartisan agreement includes several provisions to enhance beneficiary access to quality health care services and improve provider payments in rural areas. According to the American Hospital Association, these provisions will save Minnesota hospitals \$176 million over 10 years.

Supporting Medical Research and Development

I certainly recognize the pivotal role federal government support has in achieving scientific gains. Past research successes have frequently led to rapid technological advances in medicine, biotechnology, and other important scientific disciplines that shape our modern lives. If America is to continue as the world leader in technological advancement, then we must spend our resources wisely.

- **National Institutes of Health Funding:**

I understand the benefits of federally-funded research and have consistently supported increased funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The NIH, a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting medical research. I am pleased that the NIH received a substantial increase in fiscal year 2004, bringing the federal government's total investment to about \$28 billion. This year, I am working on efforts to double funding for Alzheimer's research at the NIH, as cosponsor of the Ronald Reagan Alzheimer's Breakthrough Act of 2004.

- **Department of Defense Research:** The Department of Defense has an office dedicated to research on specific Congressionally-mandated programs. I have been a strong advocate for these programs, which fund research to eradicate diseases and support soldiers for the benefit of the American public. The University of Minnesota is also involved in much of this important research.

- **Muscular Dystrophy:** For fiscal year 2005, I secured \$3.5 million for the Muscle Research Consortium. This research has major implications for people suffering from life threatening neuromuscular diseases such as Muscular Dystrophy. I also worked to secure \$5.25 million for this consortium last year.

- **Breast Cancer:** Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women, accounting for 32 percent of all cancers in women. This year, more than 200,000 women in the United States will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and more than 40,000 will die from the disease. I joined my colleagues in an

effort to ensure that \$150 million is provided for the Department of Defense Breast Cancer Research Program in fiscal year 2005.

- **Tuberous Sclerosis:** Tuberous sclerosis is a genetic disorder that can affect any or all systems of the body, and is characterized by seizures, developmental delays, kidney disease, behavioral problems, and the growth of benign tumors on vital organs such as the brain, kidneys, and heart. I have worked to ensure that \$3.2 million is provided for the Department of Defense Tuberous Sclerosis Complex Research Program in fiscal year 2005.

Addressing the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

I have advocated for increased awareness and efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in America and abroad. In July 2003, I introduced the Eric and Brian Simon Act, which was inspired by two Minnesota boys whose father contracted AIDS through a blood transfusion while serving in the Army National Guard. This bill would provide a \$100,000 benefit to veteran families for every family member infected with HIV/AIDS as a result of a service-related blood transfusion.

I am also proud to have co-authored amendments that have increased our commitment to fighting this disease abroad by some \$530 million. I will continue to fight to make sure this aid is spent wisely and on the technologies and methods that are most effective.

UNITED STATES SENATOR NORM COLEMAN

Working to Improve
Health Care in America

"I believe one of the most important functions of government is to promote the health and well-being of its citizens. As a member of the United States Senate, I am working to improve access to health care and bring equity and fairness to fundamental programs like Medicare."

U.S. SENATOR NORM COLEMAN

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